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ABSTRACT

Two studies were conducted to evaluate newly developed measures of attitudes about adoption. The Attitudes toward Adoption Scale was developed, based on research literature, to investigate the attitudes of people with and without experience with adoption toward adoption. Eighty-six college students completed this scale and made open-ended comments about each item. The Gay and Lesbian Parents' Adoption Scale was developed to measure attitudes toward adoptions by gay and lesbian parents. This scale was administered to 299 college students. Initial findings from these studies indicate that both scales have acceptable validity and reliability. A limitation of the study was that the sample was extremely homogeneous, consisting primarily of young heterosexual female psychology majors who had not been adopted. (Contains 3 tables and 13 references.) (SLD)

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Running Head: ADOPTION ATTITUDE SCALES

Development and Validation of the *Attitudes Toward Adoption Scale* and the *Gay and Lesbian Parents' Adoption Scale*

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Development and Validation of the *Attitudes Toward Adoption Scale* and the *Gay and Lesbian Parents' Adoption Scale*

The adoption of a child establishes a legal relationship between child and parent based on social and behavioral aspects of parenting, as opposed to biological aspects. However, current policy and clinical practice often favor kinship based on biology (Bartholet, 1993), and there is speculation that medical technology enabling couples with a history of infertility to conceive encourages the idea that biological parenthood is preferable to adoption (Williams, 1992). While there is extensive research on attitudes toward adoption held by adoptive parents, birth parents, and adopted children, little empirical research has examined the attitudes toward adoption held by community members.

The attitudes toward adoption held by the general community are important for a number of reasons. First, there are approximately a half-million children in the United States in need of a permanent safe and loving home; the extent to which potential parents support adoption is related to the likelihood that these children will be adopted. Furthermore, many couples struggling with infertility would like to adopt a newborn child; but compared to other age groups, few newborns are available for adoption. Whether or not birth parents choose to place a newborn up for adoption is strongly related to their attitudes toward adoption (Daly, 1994), as well as the attitudes of those around them (Kallen & Griffore, 1990). In addition, social support within the community can be important to the functioning of the adoptive family. Finally, public opinion about adoption often informs legislation on adoption (Cahill, 1998).

It is also unclear if community attitudes about adoption differ based on characteristics of the adoptive parents. For example, the extent to which the contemporary social climate is supportive of gay and lesbian couples choosing to become parents through adoption remains unclear. The adoption of children by gay and lesbian parents in becoming increasingly common, and gay and lesbian parents are increasingly "coming out" (Sullivan & Baques, 1999); In fact, the extent to which it is supported in the gay and lesbian communities is even unclear (Savage, 1999). Currently, there exists no standardized measure to assess attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents' choosing to adopt.

Previous research on attitudes toward adoption used predominantly interviews with open-ended responses (e.g. Miall, 1987, 1996, 1998; Rompf, 1993) or instruments developed for very specific populations, such as adolescent birth parents (e.g. Daly, 1994; Kallen & Griffore, 1990). This paper describes two studies that evaluate two new measures. One measure is intended to assess a breadth of attitudes toward adoption held by individuals with or without experience with adoption. The second measure assesses attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents' adopting children.

Study One: Instrument Development

A literature review was conducted to generate items for a new measure of attitudes toward adoption. Item development was derived primarily from the work of Miall (1987, 1996, 1998), Daly (1994), Kallen and Griffore (1990), and Williams (1992). Statements made in the literature about adoption were converted into items followed by a six-point Likert-type scale with responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. In previous research Miall (1996) explored several constructs that make up attitudes toward adoption. She proposed five such constructs: a) adoptive parenthood is basically the same or different than biological parenthood, b) adoptive mothers have the same maternal feelings as biological mothers, c) adoptive fathers have the same paternal feelings as biological fathers, d) adopted children are more of a risk than children obtained through birth, and e) adopted children are more likely to be a problem than others. Items were selected to represent these five constructs, as well as issues

surrounding the use of reproductive technology, and the "appropriateness" of different types of adoptive parents, such as single parents, low-income parents, and gay and lesbian parents.

Participants and Procedures

Eighty-six heterosexual college students (*M* age 20.5, *sd*=3.8; 59 female) taking child psychology at a New England state college completed the informed consent, followed by the two scales. Participants were also asked to make open-ended comments about each item. In particular, they were asked if any items were confusing, offensive or insensitive. Students received extra credit for their participation.

Results

Based on examination of the open-ended responses, one confusing item, and two items deemed offensive were eliminated. Preliminary item analyses were conducted on each scale. Items for which responses showed little or no variance were cut (2 items). The result was that the *Attitudes Toward Adoption Scale (ATAS)* contained 21 items that asked opinions about different aspects of adoption, and the *Gay and Lesbian Adoption Scale* (*GLAS*) contained 12 items that asked about attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents and their right to adopt.

Study Two: Validation and Reliability Study

The purpose of the second study was to examine the internal-consistency reliability and construct validity of the new scales. It was anticipated that the new scales would be related to other variables in a manner consistent with psychological theory and research. Specifically, we hypothesized that: (a) the Attitudes Toward Adoption Scale (*ATA)* would be positively related to attitudes toward gay and lesbian adoption as assessed by the new scale (*GLAS)* and attitudes toward adoption by heterosexual, lesbian, and gay parents as assessed by the *Couples Rating Questionnaire* (*CRQ*; Crawford & Solliday, 1996), (b) responses on the *GLAS* would be negatively related to the *Index of Homophobia* (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), and positively related to scores on the *CRQ for lesbian and gay parents*, (c) as indicated in previous research female students would be more supportive of adoption and less homophobic than male students, and upper-class students would be more supportive and less homophobic than first or second year students, and (d) also as indicated by previous research (Miall, 1996), students with personal experiences related to adoption will have more positive attitudes toward adoption, and students with personal experiences with lesbian or gay individuals will be less homophobic and more supportive of lesbian and gay parenting and adoption (Wills & Crawford, 2000).

Participants

Two-hundred-ninety college students (73% female, 91% Euro-American; *M* age 20.6, *sd*=4.8) from a small New England state college participated in the study. Twenty-six percent were in their first year of college, 15% sophomores, 24% junior, and 32% seniors. Most were Catholic (67%) or Protestant (14%). Three of the participants were adopted (1%), and 3% had a parent or sibling that was adopted. Most of the students reported that they were heterosexual (97%). Seventy-three percent had at least one close friend that was gay or lesbian, and 35% had a gay or lesbian relative.

Procedure

Students were recruited through psychology classes, and received extra credit for their participation. Participants completed an informed consent form, and then received a questionnaire

containing the *ATA* scale, a case vignette and *Couples Rating Questionnaire* (*CRQ*; Crawford & Solliday, 1996), the *Index of Homophobia* (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980), the *GLAS*, and questions about background and demographic information. Participation took approximately 30 minutes.

Instruments

The *ATA* scale contained 21 items about attitudes toward adoption, and the *GLAS* contained 12 items about gay and lesbian parenting and adoption. All response options used 6-point Likert-type responses where 1 indicated strongly agree, and 6 strongly disagree. An even number of response options was used in order to avoid the neutral or no opinion middle point. Some of the items represented positive statements, and some negative attitudes.

The *ATA* is designed to uncover attitudes and beliefs about specific aspects of adoption (see Table 1). This can be accomplished by examination of responses on individual items. However, the *ATA* also provides a global score of attitudes toward adoption. A review of the literature indicated that attitudes toward adoption fall along a continuum, where people at one end highlight the social and nurturing aspects of parenting (support for adoption), and individuals at the other end emphasize the importance of a biological link between parent and child (negative attitudes toward adoption). To obtain a total score for the *ATA* scale, negatively worded items (7 items) were reverse coded, and eighteen of the items summed (3 items are not included in the total score since the responses to those items do not logically fall on the continuum). Possible total scores can range from 18 to 108. Lower scores indicate a negative attitude toward adoption, and higher scores indicate strong support for adoption. Internal consistency reliability (coefficient alpha) for the 18 item scale was .84.

Twelve items were developed to assess attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting and adoption (*GLAS*, see Table 2). High scores indicated positive attitudes, and low scores reflected negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian parents' adopting. Four items were positively worded, thus reverse scored when computing a total score. Possible total scores range from 12 to 72 (α=.93).

Participants also completed a measure of homophobia. *The Index of Homophobia* (Hudson & Ricketts, 1980) contains 25 statements about different degrees of interaction with homosexuals, and allows respondents to indicate their agreement with each statement using a 5-point Likert type scale where 1 indicates strongly agree, and 5 strongly disagree. Negatively worded items are reverse scored to obtain a total score. Total scores can range from 25 (little fear of homosexual men or women) to 125 (a great deal of fear of homosexual men or women). Similar to previous research, this scale was found to have high reliability (α=.89).

Participants also read one case vignette and then completed the *Couples Rating Questionnaire* (*CRQ*), an 8-item scale (α=.85) created by Crawford and Solliday (1996). The case vignette of approximately 500 words describes a college educated mature professional couple interested in adopting a 5-year old orphaned child. Participants were randomly assigned to read one of six vignettes, each the same, with the exception of the sex of the characters; (1) John and Kim wishing to adopt a male child, (2) John and Kim wishing to adopt a female child, (3) John and Ken wising to adopt a male child, (4) John and Ken wishing to adopt a female child, (5) Jane and Kim wishing to adopt a male child, and (6) Jane and Kim wishing to adopt a female child. The questions that followed asked about the suitability of the parents. Responses for the *Couples Rating Questionnaire* were summed to create a total score. Additional items, created by the authors, asked about general support for adoption, as well as specific concerns about emotional, sexual or physical abuse in this specific case, and were not used in computing the total score.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Tables 1, 2, and 3 show means and standard deviations for scale items, and total scores.

The construct validity of the *ATA* and *GLAS* were examined using several criterion variables. Pearson product moment correlations were computed to assess the interrelationships between the new measures, *ATA* and *GLAS*, and other measures of attitudes toward adoption, gay and lesbian adoption, and homophobia. Because the purpose of these correlations was to assess the relationship between the constructs assessed by these scales, and because each of these measures has less than perfect reliability, both pearson product moment correlations and disattenuated correlations (corrected for reliability) are reported respectively in order to present an estimation of the true inter-correlations among these constructs. As predicted, *ATA* was positively related to the *GLAS* (r=.65, p<.001; r=.73) and the *CRS* (r=.58, p<.001; r=.67). *GLAS* was negatively related to the *Index of Homophobia* (r=-.67, p<.001; r=-.73) and positively related to the *CRQ* (r=.62, p<.001; r=.72).

It was hypothesized that sex and age differences would be found on the *ATA* scale. There were statistically significant differences between male and female students' attitudes toward adoption as assessed by the *ATA* scale ($t_{(284)}$=7.7 , p=.001), and *CRS* ($t_{(282)}$=5.2 , p=.001), as well as differences on the *Index of Homophobia* ($t_{(284)}$=-6.1 , p=.001), and the *GLAS* ($t_{(283)}$=7.5 , p=.001). Females were more supportive of adoption and gay and lesbian parenting, as well as less homophobic. As predicted, year in school was related to attitudes toward adoption as assessed by the *ATA* scale ($F_{(3, 278)}$=5.1, p=.002), as well as related to attitudes toward gay and lesbian parenting ($F_{(3, 277)}$=3.1, p=.04), and homophobia ($F_{(3, 277)}$=7.8, p<.001). Students with more years in school held significantly more positive attitudes toward adoption, gay and lesbian parenting, and homosexuality.

It was also hypothesized that personal exposure to adoption or homosexuality would influence scores on the *ATA*, *GLAS*, *Index of Homophobia*, and *CRS*. There were no statistically significant differences on any of the scales when comparing individuals who were adopted or had a family member or friend who was adopted to individuals with no personal exposure to adoption. Similarly, there were no significant differences for scores on the *ATA*, *GLAS* or *CRS* when comparing individuals who were homosexual or had a homosexual family member or friend to those with no personal exposure to homosexual individuals. But, there was a significant difference in homophobia ($F_{(1, 282)}$=10.8, p=.001). Individuals reporting no personal exposure to homosexuality were significantly more homophobic than individuals with exposure to homosexuality.

Discussion

These initial findings indicate the *ATA* scale and *GLAS* have acceptable validity and reliability. A limitation of this study arises from the fact that the sample was extremely homogeneous, and consisted of predominantly young, heterosexual, well educated, female, psychology majors who were not adopted. We do not know how these scales will perform when used with persons from more diverse age groups or backgrounds; however, the data presented in this paper indicate sufficiently strong reliability and validity so that we recommend the use of these measures in future research.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes Toward Adoption Scale

	Question	*M*	*sd*
X	5. I feel it is unethical for a man and woman to pay a surrogate mother to carry the biological child of the man.	4.6	1.2
X	6. I think it is unethical for a man and woman to buy donated sperm in order for the woman to give birth.	4.7	1.2
X	21. Open adoption, where birth mother and adoptive parents are given information about each other, and in some cases meet, is optimal.	1.9	1.0
	3. Pregnancy and labor create a link between birth mother and baby that adoptive mothers can never have.	3.3	1.5
	7. I believe a couple should try every medical route available to them before they consider adoption.	4.3	1.5
R	9. Adopted children are the real children of their adoptive parents.	4.5	1.3
	10. The best or most authentic parenting is when there is a blood tie between parent and child.	4.4	1.3
R	11. Adoptive parents are basically the same as birth parents.	4.6	1.2
R	13. Adoptive mothers have the same maternal feelings as birth mothers.	4.6	1.2
R	14. Pregnancy, birth, and a blood tie have nothing to do with the day-to-day raising of a child.	4.1	1.3
	16. A biological tie between parent and child is important for bonding and love.	3.9	1.4
	17. Adopted children are less bonded to their parents than biological children.	4.6	1.1
	18. Adopted children are more difficult to raise than a child that is biologically "yours."	4.7	1.0
	20. Adopted children are more likely to end up with psychological problems.	4.4	1.1
	22. Rather than adopt a child of a different race, it is better to adopt a child that looks like the parents.	4.5	1.3
	23. Adopting a child from a different country deprives the child of their real heritage.	4.2	1.2
	24. Single mothers should not be allowed to adopt.	4.9	1.1
	25. Gay males should not be allowed to adopt.	4.6	1.5
	26. Lesbian women should not be allowed to adopt.	4.7	1.5
	27. Low-income parents should not be allowed to adopt.	3.9	1.3
R	28. Overall, I would say that adoption is good for children.	5.0	1.0

n=290
R=items are reverse coded
X=items not included in total score

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics for Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Parenting

	Question	*M*	*sd*
	1. Gay male couples are more dangerous parents than heterosexual couples.	4.7	1.3
	2. It is unethical for a gay man to hire a surrogate to carry his biological child.	4.3	1.5
	3. Gay male couples should not be allowed to be foster parents.	4.5	1.5
R	4. I find it acceptable if a gay male couple adopts hard to place or special needs children.	4.5	1.4
R	5. Gay male couples should be given equal priority as other couples when adopting a healthy newborn baby.	4.4	1.5
	6.Children raised by gay fathers are more likely to become homosexual than children raised by heterosexual parents.	4.6	1.3
	7. Lesbian couples are more dangerous than heterosexual couples.	4.9	1.2
	8. It is unethical for a lesbian to buy donated sperm in order for her to have a biological child	4.9	1.2
	9. Lesbian couples should not be allowed to be foster parents.	4.4	1.4
R	10. I think a lesbian couple should have the right to adopt hard to place or special needs children.	4.8	1.3
R	11. Lesbian couples should be given equal priority as other couples when adopting a healthy newborn baby.	4.5	1.7
	12. Children raised by lesbian mothers are more likely to become homosexual than children raised by heterosexual parents.	4.7	1.3

n=290
R=items are reverse coded

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics for Total Scores

Measure	*M*	*sd*
Attitudes Toward Adoption	79.3	12.1
Attitudes Toward Gay and Lesbian Parents' Adopting	54.9	12.6
Index of Homophobia	65.4	14.6
Couples Rating Scale	54.9	5.7

n=290

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